

EAST PROVIDENCE SCHOOL DEPARTMENT

East Providence City Hall

145 Taunton Avenue

East Providence, Rhode Island 02914

February 18, 2011

Open Session

Mr. Charles Tsonos, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 7:30PM. School Committee Members present: Stephen Furtado, Ryan Tellier, Chrissy Rossi, Charles Tsonos (Luisa Abatecola, absent). Also present: Dr. Mario F. Cirillo, Jr., Superintendent, Mr. Robert Silva, Esq., and Andrew Thomas, Esq.

A motion was made by Mr. Furtado to convene in Executive Session for purposes of discussing:

- 1) Personnel: R.I. Gen. Laws §42-46-5(a) (1): Superintendent's Performance and Contract, Chief Operating Officer's Contract, Administrators' Contracts**
- 2) Collective Bargaining: R.I. Gen. Laws §42-46-5(a) (2): Teacher Layoffs**
- 3) Litigation: R.I. Gen. Laws §42-46-5(a) (2): Litigation, Pending Cases and Potential Litigation**

Motion seconded by Mr. Tellier. Vote 4-0.

The School Committee returned to Public Session. The Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag & Moment of Silence were observed.

A motion was made by Mr. Furtado to return to open session, seconded by Mr. Tellier. Vote 4-0.

A motion was made by Mr. Furtado to seal the minutes of the Executive Session, seconded by Tellier. Vote 4-0.

Report Executive Session Votes - Mr. Furtado reported that the School Committee voted to support the Superintendent's recommendation to lay off 18 staff members/positions to be notified by March 1, 2011 due to uncertainty of funds, budgetary constraints, and elimination of programs/positions. Motion was seconded by Ryan Tellier. Vote 4-0.

Superintendent's Contract – Mr. Tsonos advised that the matter was discussed in executive session.

Chief Operating Officer's Contract – A motion was made by Mrs. Rossi to terminate the contract of the Chief Operating Officer without cause as set forth in the contract, seconded by Mr. Tellier. Vote 4-0.

Administrators' Raises – Mr. Tsonos asked to take this item off the docket.

Mr. Tsonos requested that Mr. Silva provide an opinion on allowing public comment. Mr. Silva advised that the School Committee held executive session beginning at 7:30PM to discuss two items and an action was taken at that time to adopt the recommendation of the Superintendent regarding 18 layoff notices. This was a special

meeting held for a specific purpose; however, he realizes that a member of the public asked to speak. The School Committee By-Laws clearly articulate that during regular meetings, the School Committee provides for two public comment opportunities; since this is not a regular meeting, the School Committee is not bound by that requirement and it is limited to the agenda set forth and advertised which did not include public comment. Mr. Silva advised that it is still the prerogative of the School Committee to choose to hold public comment by unanimous vote. Mr. Tellier motioned to open the floor to public comment, second Mr. Furtado. Vote 4-0.

Mrs. Kathy Blackmar has two students at the high school and since the School Committee discussed the Superintendent's contract; she wanted to let them know what has been accomplished in two and one half years; she mentioned his oversight of the educational and business side: Bradley Partnership, elimination of buybacks, deficit elimination plan, new computer labs, and Smart boards; things we have not had which are instrumental to students. In addition, bus cameras for student safety, a bond for energy renovation with reimbursement, addressing facility violations, particularly those in the NESASC report, and Power school for high school parents. Mrs. Blackmar thought it unbelievable on what has been accomplished; with the focus on teaching and learning, we have seen improvement in the NECAP scores.

She felt that consistency is important; she has a senior and in the past four years we have had five to six high school principals and if

that change again, we would be hurting the kids. Parents receive new information about graduation requirements every year due to changes in the PBGR and the students getting teaching and learning skills they need to go to college. She hoped the School Committee would take into consideration what he has done and keep him in the district.

Cheryl Ursillo, the Interim Director of Pupil Personnel echoed the sentiments of the prior speaker and she spoke on behalf of the Superintendent. She was hired in May and found the department with few internal controls, little oversight and void of operating protocols and procedure. She was charged with fixing the problems; opportunities for staff regarding professional development have shown positive results.

She has worked for many administrators over a 36 year career, and believes that Dr. Cirillo is one of the very best, easily approachable, welcomes and respects the point of view of others and has a vision for the district of all children first, mentioning Bradley Partnership as an example of that commitment.

Bill Murphy Riverside commented that the School Department has had some tough challenges over the last few years, the city is divided about what has happened in the School Department, and his observation is that a sentiment of blame is going on. As part of actions taken such as reduction of teachers' pay and a tight financial situation and it is easy to blame people such as Dr. Cirillo and Mr.

Barham; he felt their performance was not being evaluated objectively and fairly . He has criticized the School Department many times, but believes that some fantastic things have gone on. He is saddened about what has happened with Mr. Barham who he considers to be a skillful administrator who cared about the schools and enhanced the Superintendent's effectiveness. He admires and respects the School Committee for bringing up the issue of invoices from previous years being paid with money for the subsequent year. He believes it is up to the School Committee to motivate the Superintendent so he can succeed and continue to move the community forward; the future of the city, the quality of education and competitiveness are important. He understands how this School Committee feels and he has had conversations with other School Committees about the anguish in making decisions they had to make, which are not personal and were not meant to hurt people financially. This School Committee may be faced with the same situation.

His biggest complaint with the budget process is that state laws to protect citizens are not being followed correctly in this community and he can document that with evidence. It is always controversial to either increase taxes or reduce public employee contract expenses and to hide that tension and push it through right now. In order to make it easier on all, try to commit to an open transparent process and when a deficit occurs, act on it. That's what should have happened; when the teachers' contract was passed, taxes should have raised or contract costs reduced so that the budget balanced,

but those actions made people angry. Members of this School Committee will have the same problems that others did.

Mrs. Rossi related that the School Committee spent about three hours in dialogue with the Superintendent and he has 100% of School Committee support right now; there were emails sent around to support the Superintendent, but it was on the agenda for a discussion. She felt that after their discussion, the School Committee has a better understanding with the Superintendent and they will support each other, teachers and staff. The School Committee is committed to making this work out.

Announcements - Ms. Rossi put out a reminder regarding the fundraiser for Scout Lyons on March 4, 2011 at the High School.

Mr. Tsonos thanked everyone for their patience and their concern about the School Department. A motion was made by Mr. Furtado to adjourn, seconded by Mr. Tellier. Vote 4-0.

Respectfully Submitted,

Patricia A. Iannelli, Administrative Assistant

Stephen Furtado, Clerk of the Committee